

Divine Grace and Walling-Off

by Nikolaos Mannes¹

Whenever a heresy has made an appearance in the Church, according to all that we read in Church history, the Orthodox expeditiously (or gradually, within a reasonable interval of time) broke communion with the exponents of the heresy; that is, they proceeded to wall themselves off from them.

The Orthodox who walled themselves off were not content with breaking communion, but undertook a great and sacred struggle for the suppression of the heresy by its condemnation and by the expulsion of *unrepentant heretics* from the Church by way of the convocation of a Major Synod. This Major Synod constituted the culmination of that sacred struggle.²

Nowhere in Church history do we read that a connection was ever made between Divine Grace and walling-off. Walling-off occurred so that the Orthodox might not become participants in heresy! How the Church was then to receive back into Her bosom the heretics condemned at a Major Synod was something that She decided at the Major Synod itself. (With regard to the reception

¹ *Nikolaos Mannes*, the author of this pivotal article, which appeared in Greek on his popular Greek-language website, *Κρυφό Σχολεῖο* (Κρυφὸ σχολεῖο, *Krypho scholeio*), or *Secret School* (<http://krufo-sxoleio.blogspot.com>), is a young religious writer and educator in Greece. His erudite and insightful articles, in which, despite often very harsh and immoderate reactions from various critics, he courageously elucidates some very complex issues concerning the history and ecclesiological significance of the Old Calendar movement, have been featured in several issues of *Orthodox Tradition*, both in English and Greek. We have added to our translation of his present commentary several explanatory notes or clarifications for our English-speaking readers, who may be unfamiliar with some of the issues, events, or individuals that he cites. These appear in brackets.

² Hence the origin of the Œcumenical Synods, which were convened, not, as some erroneously think, to define the Faith, but to combat heresies. They defended the extant Faith, which Christ gave, the Apostles preached, and the Church Fathers and Saints preserved (cf. St. Athanasios the Great)—*Trans.*

of heretics in general, see especially the Second and Seventh (Ecumenical Synods.)

This connection between the existence or non-existence of Divine Grace (and, consequently, between valid or invalid Mysteries, respectively) and walling-off was only made in the recent past, for the first time, with the most recent major heresy to assail the Church, ecumenism, a pan-heresy that continues to assail it.

Thus, following the calendar innovation of 1924, the first significant step in the implementation of ecumenism in practice, a faction of the Orthodox who had walled themselves off, refusing to accept the New Calendar, asserted that the New Calendar Church did not have Divine Grace and that Her Mysteries were invalid. This view was considered to be a dogma of the Faith, and all who did not accept it were deemed excommunicates. In this way, unfortunately, the notorious Matthewite schism, the eightieth anniversary of which falls this year, was created.³

The Matthewites, forging for the first time a connection between two things that have no relationship with one another, *viz.*, Divine Grace and walling-off, maintained that if there was validity in the Mysteries of the innovators, then it was wrong to wall oneself off from them. Father Evgenios Tombros⁴ wrote, apropos this subject: “If they [the New Calendarists] have Grace, upon what Canon will we rely in order to disavow this Church? And why should we disavow it, since it has Grace and we can be saved there, too? In that case, why should we undergo persecution, harassment, toil, imprisonment, exile, and hardship, all to no purpose?”

This opinion filtered down to ample elements in the Synod of those in succession to St. Chrysostomos the New of Phlorina. Thus it was that one of those under the sway of Matthewitism, Father Markos Chaniotes, asserted along similar lines: “Why should

³ The three Bishops from the State Church of Greece—including St. Chrysostomos of Phlorina (Florina), the “Father” of the movement—who rejected the adoption of the Papal Calendar by the Holy Synod in the second decade of the last century, walled themselves off and restored their adherence to the traditional Church Calendar. In providing an administration for this Church in resistance, they Consecrated a fiery Athonite monk as Bishop of Bresthene (or Bresthena), who in turn declared the State Church of Greece to be without Grace, and thus effected a schism that represents a small minority of the Greek Old Calendarists to this day—*Trans.*

⁴ One of the more vociferous of the Matthewite apologists († 1982).

we leave the New Calendar Church, since She has Grace?”

In our day, this idea has also influenced those who have lately walled themselves off from the New Calendar Church. Father Evthymios Trikamenas,⁵ for example, misusing the words St. Theodore the Studite [*vide infra*], writes: “...St. Theodore the Studite was very clear in his opposition to the mysteries of the heretics of his time; after the Confessors of Orthodoxy had walled themselves off, he taught that such mysteries were invalid. He maintained the same clear position with regard to the Churches of the heretics, teaching that, after an official acceptance of heresy, the Guardian Angel of the Church withdraws, and it becomes an ordinary house, without a trace of sacredness. Evidently for the Saint, therefore, walling-off means that you are distancing yourself from something that has fallen away and been transformed, and not that you are leaving something that, while it is indeed fallen as regards the Faith, nonetheless does preserve the saving and sanctifying energy of the Grace of the Holy Spirit in its Mysteries. For if the sanctifying energy [of Grace] is preserved in the Mysteries, how is it possible for us to withdraw through walling-off at a time when the Holy Spirit has not departed from the Mysteries or from such Churches, and in this way to show ourselves more regal than the king? And why should the Holy Spirit wait and not withdraw until our own Synodal decision, which will, by this thinking, mandate the manner of His withdrawal?”

Father Epiphanius Theodoropoulos⁶ had the same way of thinking about the connection between Divine Grace and walling-off, with the difference that he employed this connection to the opposite effect, for the purpose of attacking the Old Calendarist Orthodox who are walled off. In his well-known book *Tà Δύο Ἐκτρεμὰ* (The two extremes), he writes: “If the New Calendarists have valid Mysteries, if the Church of Greece has Grace, then they are truly an Orthodox Church, a Church of Christ, and everyone who departs therefrom becomes a schismatic.”

Unfortunately, the connection between Divine Grace and walling-off, in these various interpretations thereof, has influenced

⁵ A Hieromonk of the State Church of Greece, Father Evthymios walled himself off from its innovating Hierarchy and was deposed in 2007 for this act of conscience.

⁶ A learned Priestmonk (†1989) much revered for his spiritual accomplishments, Father Epiphanius was also, paradoxically, a frequently offensive and quite spiteful polemicist against the Old Calendarists in Greece—*Trans.*

many people, such as the eminent Father George Metalle[i]nos.⁷ He writes in a letter of his to Father Theodoretos, when the latter was putting pressure on him to wall himself off: “Since sanctification exists in the New Calendar [Church], too, I am persuaded that Grace exists there as well, and therefore also the potential for confession and salvation.” Elsewhere he writes: “Seeing that the sanctity of my Church remains incorrupt, I have the assurance that I have not been torn away from our Saints and that their Trinitarian Grace acts on us as well, not through our unworthiness, but for the salvation of our people (‘God does not ordain all, but works through all,’ as St. John Chrysostomos says). I am not writing these things to provoke you—I respect your decision [as one walled off]—but to justify my hesitation....”⁸

The aforementioned injudicious connection has caused tragic losses in the sacred struggle against the pan-heresy [of ecumenism]. One faction of Orthodox [i.e., the Matthewites] has been cut off from their fellow-strugglers for eighty years, now; another faction [those allegedly resisting from within] contend against the same Orthodox strugglers, whom they see as supposedly being at the opposite extreme of ecumenism (with which pan-heresy they are in communion!); and a third faction, not wishing to enlist in the sacred struggle, resting content with the fact that there is Divine Grace [in the New Calendar Church]. To these factions, the contemporary Holy Fathers St. Chrysostomos of Phlorina and Hieromonk Theodoretos (Mavros)⁹ juxtapose the Orthodox teaching on this subject, demonstrating that this notion is misguided and pernicious to the Old Calendarist struggle.

St. Chrysostomos the New emphasized that the Orthodox ought to “break ecclesiastical communion with the innovators, even before a Synodal judgment, lest they, too, be responsible before the whole Church,”¹⁰ noting that the mentality of the Matthe-

⁷ An erudite, pious married Priest and Dean *emeritus* of the Theological School of the University of Athens, Father George has always maintained a moderate view of, and sympathetic respect for, the Greek Old Calendarists. Several of his scholarly studies have appeared in *Orthodox Tradition—Trans.*

⁸ See <http://vasilevousa1453.blogspot.gr/2017/02/blog-post.html>.

⁹ A well-known Athonite zealot and learned theologian († 2007), he was much revered by the late Father Seraphim (Rose) of Platina and closely aligned with the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. He reposed before its reunion with Moscow, which he did not support.

¹⁰ “Pastoral Encyclical,” Athens, June 1, 1944.

wites concerning the loss of Divine Grace and invalid Mysteries aims “on the one hand, [at] attracting other converts to the Old Calendar, brandishing the invalidity of the Mysteries of the New Calendarists as a bugbear, and, on the other hand, [at] keeping these followers, and especially the gullible and the lukewarm, in our sacred struggle.”¹¹

The late Father Theodoretos composed many illuminating writings in which he refuted both the stands of the Matthewites and those under the sway of Matthewitism, in addition to the stands taken by the followers of Father Epiphanius and the conservative New Calendarists:

“The existence of Grace does not ensure salvation. One can very easily partake hypostatically of the ‘Body and Blood of Christ’ and, in spite of this, suffer the chastisements of Hell! Proof of this are the words of the Lord in the Gospel, according to which those who work miracles, signs, and prophecies, if they do not have personal virtue, will suffer the chastisements of Hell! (St. Matthew 7:21-23). Consequently, just as the working of miracles does not signify the assurance of salvation, so also the existence of Grace in the New Calendar Church in no way dictates or, rather, in no way permits communion with Her, insofar as She fosters misbelief and innovation.”¹²

“Father Evgenios [see footnote 4, *supra*] vigorously responds, ‘Upon what Canon, then, will we rely, in order to disavow this Church,’ if the New Calendarists have Grace? What could be more naïve or anti-traditional than this? He certainly could never have read the very beautiful words of St. Nicodemos, who, in his marvellous work *Concerning Frequent Communion*, writes the following words, which are exceedingly appropriate to our case: ‘Time will not suffice for me to enumerate countless examples of the very many Saints who have suffered hardship and death for the sake of the institutions and Canons of the Church.’¹³ In other words, for every Canon that is trampled upon, for every ecclesi-

¹¹ “Clarification by Metropolitan Chrysostomos of His Pastoral Encyclical,” January 18, 1945. St. Chrysostomos, in short, saw this mentality as being, at best, a tactic, and thus, at worst, implicitly disingenuous and divisive.

¹² “Second Open Letter to Archpriest Evgenios Tombros,” Holy Mountain and Athens, 1972.

¹³ See Hieromonk Patapios and Archbishop Chrysostomos, *Manna from Athos: The Issue of Frequent Communion on the Holy Mountain in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006), p. 164.

astical institution that constitutes a tradition of Holy Orthodoxy and is violated, the faithful believer is enjoined to react and even to shed his very blood in order to impede the work of innovators. *It would be truly foolish for the faithful first to wait for the Mysteries of the innovating Church to be lost (and how would they be informed of this?) and then to react, abdicating their responsibilities.*"¹⁴

[In a letter to another churchman, Father Theodoretos writes:] "What Holy Father has ever issued such a proclamation, Father Markos,¹⁵ to wit, that if Grace exists, we should not withdraw from the Church, even if Her Shepherds innovate by trampling upon the sacred Canons and the all-honorable traditions of Orthodoxy? Does not St. Nicodemos thunder in his *Concerning Frequent Communion* that 'Time will not suffice for me to enumerate countless examples of the very many Saints who have suffered hardship and death for the sake of the institutions and Canons of the Church'?¹⁶ But even before St. Nicodemos, does not the great Athanasios Parios, together with the Divine Chrysostomos, praise the faithful people of Constantinople, who endured hell on earth because they did not wish to accept someone else on the throne of the unjustly exiled Chrysostomos, their Chief Shepherd? 'Some were scourged, others were thrown into prison; yet others were slain, some in actual experience, others by will alone..., preferring both to do and to suffer everything, so as not to commune with the iniquity of those who dared such things.'¹⁷ Are you listening, Father Markos? They endured everything 'so as not to commune,' yet there was no talk about the loss of Grace from the faction opposed to the Holy Father. And Chrysostomos continues: 'So, tell me, are these small matters, that the Church gains so great a company of Martyrs? For these are all Martyrs.' Do you hear, most reverend Father? St. Chrysostomos reckons as Martyrs all who did not commune with the violators of just one sacred

¹⁴ *Τὸ Ἡμερολογιακὸν Σχίσμα* (The calendar schism) (Holy Mountain and Athens: 1973), p. 9.

¹⁵ Father Markos (Chaniotes), a widely revered Old Calendarist monastic who reposed in 1977.

¹⁶ See Patapios and Chrysostomos, *Manna from Athos*, p. 164.

¹⁷ St. John Chrysostomos, "Homily to Those Scandalized at Adversities," §19, *PG* 52:518-519, cited by St. Athanasios Parios, *Δήλωσης τῆς περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἀγίῳ Ὄρει παραχῶν ἀληθείας* (Declaration of the truth concerning the disturbances on the Holy Mountain), ch. 14.

Canon. They never thought of proclaiming what you and your followers say: ‘Since there is Grace, then why do we not commune with the transgressors who introduced the calendar innovation?’ Or do you really doubt that there was Grace in the persecutors of the Holy Father, given that their leader and his successor, Arsakios, became a Saint?”¹⁸

[In yet another instance, Father Theodoretos writes that:] “The argument [of Father Epiphaneios Theodoropoulos] is fundamentally deceptive and devious. This is because it *is* possible for a single Bishop or a single Church to have Grace, but to be potentially schismatic or heretical, a teaching which Father Epiphaneios himself accepts! The believer who partakes of the Chalice of such a Church receives Christ, but unto condemnation and not unto illumination and deification, as always happens with those who commune unworthily. The foregoing condemnation will be varied in nature, depending always on the level of one’s awareness of wrong belief. Consequently, when an Orthodox believer, be he a layman or a clergyman, withdraws from such a potentially schismatic or heretical Church and severs all communion with it, he does not become a schismatic but is, according to the teaching of the sacred Canons, worthy of praise!” (*Τὸ Ἀντίδοτον* [The antidote]).

But others too, such as the late theologian Aristoteles Delembases, proved from the Fathers the lack of any connection between Divine Grace and walling-off. Here are two telling excerpts from his pen:

“If we are walled off, that is, separated, and do not commune of the Mysteries of heretics who have fallen away from Orthodoxy ‘prior to a Synodal verdict (judgment and condemnation),’ we do so in a manner pleasing to God. It is not because the Mysteries celebrated by them are not efficacious, but lest, by communing with them, we sin, and in this way embrace heresy and, [failing to] acknowledge a heretic from the ranks of the Orthodox as a heretic, cause scandal along with him” (*Καλὴ Ὁμολογία* [Good confession]).

“Walling-off from a Bishop under the sway of heresy occurs, not because he has lost Grace, but because he is fallen, having preached heresy, and on account of this commandment: for, if a

¹⁸ “Second Reply to the most reverend Monk, Father Markos Chaniotes,” Holy Mountain, December 19, 1975.

Bishop is ‘wicked,’ ‘for the sake of the Faith shun him and withdraw,’ commands God through the Saints.”¹⁹

As for the position taken by Father Evthymios Trikamenas and those with him, the only point that needs to be emphasized is that their entire ecclesiological doctrine concerning the loss of Divine Grace and invalid Mysteries is based on a misuse of the writings of St. Theodore the Studite, who expressed his relevant views *after* the [official and synodal] condemnation of the Iconoclasts by the Seventh Œcumenical Synod, since it was then (in the second phase of Iconoclasm, that is) that this Holy Father and Confessor of the Church flourished.

It is my sincere wish that all that I have written here will contribute to a disjunction between the two issues in question, namely Divine Grace and walling-off, which bear no relation to each other, so that this disconnection might deliver our erstwhile brethren from a grievous eighty-year-long division and our potential brethren from deadly communion with the pan-heresy [of ecumenism], to the end that we might all strive together for the day when Orthodoxy will shine forth to the ends of the world through a Major Synod of those who are truly Orthodox.

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¹⁹ St. John Chrysostomos (*PG* 63:231), in Delembases’ *Πάσχα Κυρίου* (The Lord’s Pascha).